

Iraq: Anti-Sadr move shoving Maliki out?

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BAGHDAD, April 17 (UPI) — The apparent move to edge out cleric Moqtada Sadr may be a U.S. strategy to shove the Iraqi prime minister aside, an independent assessment speculates.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said in an April 7 interview with CNN that operations targeting Sadr would continue “until a decisive victory is achieved.”

But if Maliki wins and removes Sadr from the picture, the political tides would turn against Maliki as many Shiites would hail Sadr as a martyr, the Canadian Center for Research on Globalization said in a report Wednesday.

The report equates Sadr’s appeal with the appeal of Hamas among Palestinians, noting Hamas’ social efforts put it in a position as a fighter for the people and not an aggressor.

Iraqi and U.S. officials say Sadr’s popularity is troublesome as elections in October could place Sadr loyalists at a distinct advantage in the Iraqi government.

The report also notes U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney has a less than favorable opinion of Maliki, who he sees as too close to Tehran.

Yet the anti-Sadr agenda could be a ploy, the report says, to force Maliki to politically self-destruct, making way for someone closer to the U.S. agenda in Iraq.

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